

Life is About Interactions

By Ben Baran, Ph.D., Agility Analytics Practice Leader

“Quite a few years of life have strengthened my conviction that each and everyone's existence is deeply tied to that of others: Life is not time merely passing by, life is about interactions.” – His Holiness Pope Francis

One benefit of my unusual career path is that I've had the chance to interact with and learn from numerous people across the worlds of business, academia and the military.

I've listened to top executives describe their triumphs and their challenges, both personal and professional.

I've worked alongside some brilliant researchers, who opened my eyes to new ways of seeing the phenomena of human behavior in organizations.

I've followed and led military professionals whom I've trusted with my life because I knew they trusted me with theirs.

I've been lucky.

Another benefit of these diverse experiences has been the realization that time marches on without ceasing and material success is fleeting (and grossly unimportant in the grand scheme of things). What's important is how you treat people and how you make their lives a little bit better.



What's important is to remember that in every interaction with our fellow humans we have the choice to breathe life and hope into that situation or not.

Every interaction is a chance to do that. And those interactions themselves are often fleeting. We have a few chances here and there to encourage a coworker. Moments to recognize someone for a job well done come and go in a flash. Even the opportunities to help people or their organizations with our products or services are often momentary, hinging on a few key conversations to build trust and understanding.

But any insight or perspective I've gained pale in comparison to those shared recently by His Holiness Pope Francis in his TED talk, which focuses in large part upon the importance of our interactions.

In his talk, he speaks to all people—regardless of their faith tradition.

He highlights the value in recognizing our human interconnectedness:

"None of us is an island, an autonomous and independent 'I,' separated from the other, and we can only build the future by standing together, including everyone."

He praises creativity combined with both courage and a respect for the past:

"Good intentions and conventional formulas, so often used to appease our conscience, are not enough. Let us help each other, all together, to remember that the other is not a statistic or a number. The other has a face. The 'you' is always a real presence, a person to take care of."

He reminds us of the power of hope in the face of despair:

"Through the darkness of today's conflicts, each and every one of us can become a bright candle; a reminder that light will overcome darkness, and never the other way around."

And he suggests that humility is central to avoiding the corrupting nature of power:

"Please, allow me to say it loud and clear: The more powerful you are, the more your actions will have an impact on people, the more responsible you are to act humbly. If you don't, your power will ruin you, and you will ruin the other. There is a saying in Argentina: 'Power is like drinking gin on an empty stomach.' You feel dizzy, you get drunk, you lose your balance, and you will end up hurting yourself and those around you, if you don't connect your power with humility and tenderness. Through humility and concrete love, on the other hand, power—the highest, the strongest one—becomes a service, a force for good."

Such insights have numerous implications for us in the workplace, particularly for those who hold positions of authority. **We must never forget that leadership is fundamentally about our relationships—and our effectiveness is often a function of the quality of our interactions with those around us.**

Watch the full TED talk here: <http://tinyurl.com/lifeisaboutinteractions>



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5.2.17

Originally Posted at: <https://www.benbaran.com/home/2017/4/27/life-is-about-interactions>